

CONGRESSMAN PETE STARK

MARCH 2006 REPORT



HOW TO END GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION: PUBLIC FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS

Our nation's government has become engulfed in corruption. Administration officials, members of Congress, and key Washington lobbyists have resigned or been indicted in ethics scandals and reports indicate that there is still more to come. This is wrong.

The status quo in Washington must change. I am working to restore honest leadership and open government. I have joined Minority Leader Pelosi and more than 160 of our Democratic colleagues to introduce strong, comprehensive ethics reform legislation. Our bill would ban lobbyist gifts and privately-sponsored travel, toughen public disclosure laws for lobbying activities, and slow the revolving door between Capitol Hill offices and K Street lobbying firms.

I support these efforts because they will improve upon the status quo. But lobbying reform alone will never end corruption. As the old adage goes, "He who pays the piper, calls the tune." Lobbyists' greatest influence stems from the need for elected officials to raise hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of dollars to get re-elected. Reform efforts that fail to sever this reliance on fundraising simply

invite lobbyists and corporate interests to continue to corrupt the legislative process at the expense of ordinary Americans.

Public financing of elections is the only way to eliminate the conflicts of interest that arise when private interests fund public campaigns. I am a cosponsor of the "Clean Money, Clean Elections" bill that would establish voluntary campaign spending limits and provide public funding for candidates who

abide by the rules. This would give candidates the ability to forgo massive private fundraising without losing the ability to compete.

Efforts to enact reforms at the state level show that public financing is a viable alternative. Arizona and Maine, for example,

have with great success offered full public financing of statewide and legislative races since the 2000 election cycle.

We should learn from these states and enact broad public financing reform at the federal level. Only this type of bold action will put an end to the culture of corruption in Washington.

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THE WRONG DIRECTION ON HEALTH CARE

In the weeks prior to the State of the Union, the American people were told President Bush would outline a bold agenda for health care reform. I hoped that, through bipartisan leadership, we would finally begin to address the serious problems with health care in this country. Unfortunately, instead of offering a real solution, the President outlined an ideological platform that would benefit special interests at the expense of people's health.

The President's plan for health care reform is to use tax incentives to move people out of traditional employer-provided health insurance and into Health Savings Accounts and high-deductible health insurance plans. These policies are founded on blind faith in the private marketplace, as well as a belief that people are over-insured and should pay more for medical care. But the private market has already given us the most expensive health system in the world while leaving 46 million people uninsured.

The best example of what happens in health care when policymakers rely too heavily on the market and a "special interests first" perspective is the recently enacted Medicare prescription drug program. Senior citizens and people with disabilities must choose from more than 40 private drug plans with different coverage levels and varying premiums despite having no real ability to compare among them. The result is massive confusion and anxiety for senior citizens and their families across our community and America – and millions still lack coverage for their needed medications.

Our health system is already overwhelmed by complexity and fraught with risk. Since 2000, almost six million people have lost their job-based health



insurance coverage. Health Savings Accounts will only accelerate this trend, jeopardizing our health security just as the loss of pensions has jeopardized our retirement security.

A person's health is at the core of their success, their happiness, and their well-being. The health of our people is also central to the success of our nation: without health, our children cannot learn, our communities cannot thrive, and our workers cannot be productive. Lack of affordable, reliable health care is the number one threat to our domestic security.

It's time to set a different course – one that provides stable, affordable, and dependable access to medical care to all people. For more than forty years, Medicare has achieved these goals. Medicare provides a solid foundation on which to build.

SURVEILLANCE THREATENS PRIVACY AND CONSTITUTION

The revelation of warrantless domestic spying by the Bush Administration is a new low for an Administration that routinely violates international treaties and has been roundly criticized for misleading the American public into war.

The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution reads: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized." The American people would never accept police breaking into their homes without a warrant, and breaking into their phone lines or emails is equally unacceptable.

That is not to suggest that emergency surveillance is never necessary. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) permits wiretaps without warrants in case of emergency, provided court approval is obtained no more than three days after wiretaps are put in place. Since FISA was enacted in 1978, more than 18,000 national security warrants have been approved and only five rejected.



The Administration is using far more sophisticated methods of warrantless wiretapping than this glass against the wall.

This order by the President must be investigated. I am a cosponsor of legislation directing the President to rescind his order and have signed a letter informing the President that he has no Congressional authority to conduct warrantless surveillance.

Unfortunately, when a President behaves as if he is above the law, there is ultimately no remedy short of removing him from office. I have joined with colleagues to call for a special committee to consider articles of impeachment. But this motion cannot proceed until a majority of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle agree to bring it forward for consideration by the House of Representatives.

SELLING OFF OUR NATIONAL PARKS

National Parks are priceless treasures whose protection I have long championed. Unfortunately, the President's 2007 budget proposes selling several hundred thousand acres of federally owned forests and rangelands. Privatizing public lands is a direct assault on our environment.

I have opposed similar actions in the past and will continue to fight to protect our National Parks. Spoiling America's treasures for short-term monetary gain is unconscionable. We in Congress have an obligation to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy the beauty of our National Parks and public lands. I will do all that I can to stop the President from selling public lands to private loggers.



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Pete Stark
M.C.
PRESORTED STANDARD

LET ME HEAR FROM YOU.

Please contact my Fremont office, send me an email or visit my website for assistance with federal agencies, updates on important legislation, and information on visits to Washington, D.C.

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PETE'S TOWN MEETINGS

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2006

Fremont
9:00-10:30 a.m.
Fremont Senior Center, Wing A
40086 Paseo Padre Parkway

San Leandro
11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
San Leandro Public Library
Dave Karp Senior Facility
300 Estudillo Avenue

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2006

Newark
9:00-10:00 a.m.
Newark City Hall
City Council Chambers
37101 Newark Boulevard

Hayward
10:30-11:30 a.m.
Hayward City Hall
City Council Chambers
777 B Street

Alameda
12:00 Noon-1:00 p.m.
Alameda City Hall
City Council Chambers
2263 Santa Clara Avenue